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'Man Bun' Alert! Hair Club for Men Could Be Next

Standouts in the 'man bun' category include Orlando Bloom, Leonardo DiCaprio, Jared Leto, Jake Gyllenhaal and Chris Hemsworth.
ANDREW H. WALKER/FRAZER HARRISON/GETTY IMAGES

by Alia Hoyt
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Guys who successfully rock a "man bun" usually exude confidence, charisma and a devil-may-might serve them well in their social and professional lives, but when worn too tightly, for too long, isn't doing their hairlines any favors.

One of the myriad causes of traction alopecia, man buns can inadvertently do some serious damage. "Tight hairstyles cause trauma, which can cause inflammation, bleeding and even scarring of the hair follicle," explains Dina D. Strachan, M.D., director of Aglow Dermatology in New York City.

In a word – ouch.

There's one major difference between this type of hair loss and other common causes. "Traction alopecia is a specific type of hair loss which results when tension is applied to hair follicles (roots) for an extended period of time," says Abraham Armani, M.D., with the American Board of Hair Restoration Surgery and Armani Medical in an email interview. "Traction alopecia, therefore, differs from most other causes of hair loss as it is behavioral and directly results from the patient's own activity."

In other words, lots of dudes lose their hair thanks to sheer genetics, but the constant wearing of excessively tight man buns can needlessly land you in the same boat.

Man buns aren't the only culprit, nor is the problem limited to guys. In fact, women are more commonly seen for style-induced hair loss, as a result of fashion choices that excessively pull, braid, twist, weave or are otherwise abusive over time, according to Armani.

"Unlike hair plucking, which is painful, persistent and prolonged, gentle pulling may go unnoticed until hair loss begins to appear," he explains, also noting that men who frequently wear compression helmets (for sports, car racing and horseback riding), or who wear hairpieces that are attached to existing hair, are also prone to the problem.

"I often see men with this type of hair loss associated with tight wrapping of hair as in a turbine for religious or cultural reasons," elaborates Robert Dorin, D.O., with True & Dorin Medical Group in an email interview.

Men with a genetic predisposition for hair loss might opt to sport tight ponytails and buns sparingly. "The thought is that men in general can have a propensity for androgenic alopecia (natural hair loss), specifically in the temple area, and the combo of that with tight pulling on the hair increases the likelihood that you can see alopecia," says Dhaval G. Bhanusali, M.D., a private practice dermatologist in Manhattan who sees at least three or four men each week for traction alopecia.

David Beckham, man bun pioneer, was sporting one back in 2003. © REUTERS/CORBIS

Science has yet to find a way to counteract the effects of traction alopecia once it's too far gone, unfortunately.

"If the hair follicles are damaged to the point that they have scarred and are no longer viable, then there is no way to reverse this," says Amir Yazdan, M.D., of the Modena Hair Transplant Institute in Irvine, California, adding that hair transplants are a commonly chosen option.

"There are currently only three clinically proven, FDA-cleared hair loss treatments, which have been tested and cleared specifically for genetic hair loss rather than traction alopecia," explains Jonathon Graff, director of clinical research and education at Apira Science, Orange County, California. "Many doctors recommend Low Level Light Therapy (LLLT) since it has no known side effects, but with any viable hair loss treatment there must be an active hair follicle to stimulate growth, or the only option is hair transplantation to replace the follicle itself," says Graff.

HOWSTUFFWORKS, STUFF MOM NEVER TOLD YOU

NOW THAT'S CRAZY

Brigham Young University banned the "man bun" in September 2015. A BYU rep said, "It's just something that deviates from the norm."

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